Television

Television, as an institution in American society, is rapidly losing appeal to me. Aside from the fact that much of what we watch celebrates the worst in each of us; it is also one of the most repetitive forms of entertainment available. I am *not* saying that all television is bad. There have been many fine hours of entertainment and a good deal of information that has been disseminated through this medium. There have been memorable characters on occasional shows for as long as I can remember. I will confess: I have been a habitual watcher of many sitcoms (*Friends, MASH,* and *The Simpsons*); news programs such as *20/20*; and once upon a time, MTV (when it played music videos for more than the insipid hour of *TRL*).

I am never one to complain about how great things were in the way-back-when as compared to the present day. Times change. People change. It is a facet of human existence that modes of popular entertainment will change as well. I do, however, feel inclined to express my great disgust at the fact that Americans spend more time in front of the television than they do living their lives. On the cover of the "Life, etc." section of my local newspaper, there was an article that discussed the fact that Americans now spend more time alone at home than ever before, eschewing socialization with others to sit around the house. Beneath this article, which I read with great interest, I saw something that made me believe once more in irony: just below a brilliant article on the decreased social habits of Americans there was a column devoted to what was new on this season's television shows, entitled "What to Watch." I think it was at this point that I had to bury my face in my hands and shriek with uncontrolled laughter. Either the layout editor didn't see the irony in what he was doing, or someone was trying to make a point: I wish I could believe the former, but the latter is probably the more true.

Not only do we spend our lives in front of a television set, slowly losing days of our existence on this planet; but we also plan our lives around the various forms of garbage emanating from it. How often does one hear people mention that they must be home by a certain time, in order not to miss "their" shows? People pay a good deal of money for the privilege of saving these shows so that they can spend the weekend watching drivel. Radio morning show hosts discuss television non-stop; rather than current events or the foibles of local and national leaders, they'll babble on incessantly about what will happen in the next episode of whatever they watched the previous night.

So what is it, then, that drives us to sit at home, night after night? What is it that is so imperative that we place our own lives on hold to sit in front of a glowing box? Take a look at the most popular shows, and something might just pop out at you. We sit, we munch, and we watch "reality" on television. Are our lives so pathetic that we feel the need to stop them for the night to watch other people live? We are denying ourselves actual experience for the purpose of viewing the actual experiences of *other people*; and, by doing so, we create a trend of more "reality" television – more life wasted by watching others live.

None of the "reality" shows truly represent reality, however. This is why the networks who produce these shows will put out an "uncensored" version of the reality show; which is a good marketing scheme so far as I can tell: if people are stupid enough to waste their lives in watching trash, perhaps they're stupid enough to shell out fifty dollars so they can see some real "reality" –

some girl's breasts, some guy acting drunk, people making out in a hot tub, some other guy getting punched in the face, and on, and on, and on. We are lining the pockets of the very people who are robbing us of our lives; all so we can see other people doing what we really want to pretend we could do – what we actually could do, if we were so inclined.

I am tired of hearing about children doing poorly in school. I'm tired of hearing teachers blamed for students' failure to succeed. Rather than accepting responsibility for our inaction and failure to lead by example, we must pass blame and place failure squarely on the shoulders of those who least deserve it. People ask themselves why their children have trouble reading, why they can't focus for more than a short time span on any task; and then proceed to blame the educational system.

If blame must be given, then blame the actual source of the trouble. Rather than place a child in front of a television set so they'll shut up and leave you alone; rather than sitting together in front of mind-numbing trash; lead by example. If your child spends five hours a week in school reading and is told by a teacher of the importance of literacy, and then goes home to watch sixteen hours a week of television either with the blessing or presence of his parents; what opinion will he have on the matter? Who is he more likely to observe and emulate, a teacher or his parents? Try once more to blame the teacher for the inability of a college freshman to write a simple, effective paragraph.

See? You can't do it, can you?